

House floor quarterbacks

Caucus whips Kelliher and Seifert wrangle votes during House debates

By PATTY JANOVEC

When members of the House of Representatives are debating a bill and the time comes to vote, someone has to go round up the yeas and nays in each caucus.

Those people, appointed by each caucus, are the majority and minority whips.

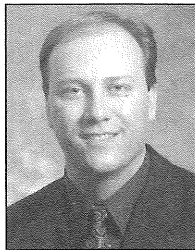
The caucus "Whip" is responsible for counting votes, and Rep. Margaret Anderson Kelliher (DFL-Mpls) and Rep. Marty Seifert (R-Marshall) have been appointed by their caucuses to fill that important role for 2003-04.

This is Seifert's second term in the position, and the first for Kelliher, who was an assistant minority leader the past two years. Kelliher serves in both roles this session.

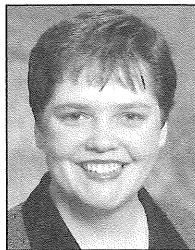
The term whip comes from the British term "whipper in" which refers to the person who kept foxhounds from leaving the pack. Its use in American government has a strong Minnesota tie, as well. It was first used in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1897 when Speaker Thomas Reed appointed Rep. James A. Tawney from Minnesota as whip.

The Minnesota House started using the position two years ago when the the House was closely divided along party lines. At the start of the 2001-02 session, Republicans numbered 69 and DFL members numbered 65.

At the time House



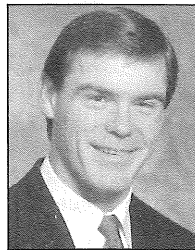
Rep. Marty Seifert



Rep. Margaret Anderson Kelliher



Rep. Greg Blaine



Rep. Mark Buesgens

House Whips

Rep. Marty Seifert - Majority Whip
Rep. Margaret Anderson Kelliher - Minority Whip

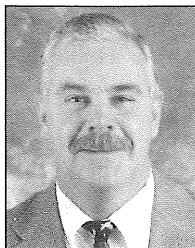
Rep. Greg Blaine - Assistant Majority Whip
Rep. Mark Buesgens - Assistant Majority Whip
Rep. Tony Cornish - Assistant Majority Whip
Rep. Chris Gerlach - Assistant Majority Whip
Rep. Denny McNamara - Assistant Majority Whip
Rep. Bud Nornes - Assistant Majority Whip
Rep. Maxine Penas - Assistant Majority Whip
Rep. Kathy Tingelstad - Assistant Majority Whip
Rep. Tim Wilkin - Assistant Majority Whip

leaders decided a more formal counting system was needed to ensure the necessary votes, thus delegating the responsibility to the whip.

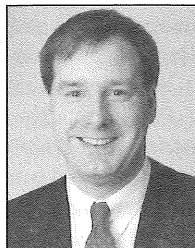
Several functions of the position for Seifert include filling in for Majority Leader Erik Paulsen (R-Eden Prairie) in leading floor debate and when he is unable to fulfill his duties of House administration; serving as vice-chair of the House Rules and Legislative Administration Committee; helping count votes on close critical issues as designated by the speaker, majority leader, or caucus executive board; and following permanent rules and parliamentary "tricks of the trade."

Seifert described his role as being an aggressive spokesman for the caucus. He also said that his role is to complement the debate style of the majority leader. "If a barn burning speech" is needed, he said, his role is to "secure the water for the caucus." He describes the relationship of majority leader to majority whip as good cop, bad cop.

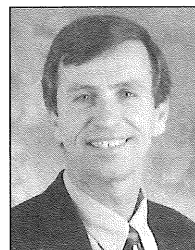
With such a large majority of Republican members in the House, the caucus also



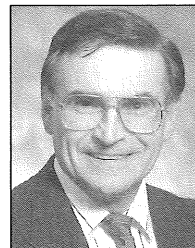
Rep. Tony Cornish



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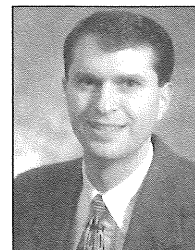
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Rep. Tim Wilkin

appointed assistant whips to help Seifert keep track of votes.

This session there are seven assistant majority whips. The DFL caucus has not yet appointed any assistant whips.

Kelliher said she sees her role as helping members participate in floor debate, giving advice, and paying attention to rules and amendments on the floor. Another aspect includes helping the caucus do its job better by visiting members in their offices making sure they are comfortable and moving ahead on agendas.

Also, Kelliher said she makes appearances for Minority Leader Matt Entenza (DFL-St. Paul) when he is unavailable. Maintaining relationships on both sides of the aisle, Kelliher describes the minority whip's position as one that conducts sensitive conversations with caucus members. With the whip being an elected position from within the caucus, she said she feels it's a stamp of approval.

She considers her responsibility to build on the traditions of the DFL caucus in the House, and to serve the people through public service. "Where we are, where we can be, that's my job to help other members see that and help them be successful."

With humor Kelliher described the teasing she now receives because of her new title. Fellow Rep. Cy Thao (DFL-St. Paul) gave her an actual whip. "Hopefully I won't be known for using a heavy hand, or the whip. I like to deliver the message more with a smile than a whip."